

CT Legislature Informational Forum, May 26 2010
Brian Johnson, President, SCSU Faculty Senate

Hello, I'm Brian Johnson, President of the Faculty Senate and Professor of English at Southern Connecticut State University. I'd like to thank Senator Handley and Representative Willis for inviting me to speak, and I want to thank the Higher Education Committee for holding today's forum. I'm here to provide you with an overview of the actions of Chancellor Carter, Chairman Krapek, and the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees under Chairman Krapek over the past year, and to communicate the serious concerns over those actions not only at Southern but across the CSU system. We have repeatedly objected to the Board of Trustees and the Chancellor's reengineering of personnel policy and to their unnecessary spending of state money related to personnel. These actions reflect a lack of transparency and a consolidation of power that we find particularly troubling—no, unconscionable—in a state institution.

Let me begin with a timeline that will these actions in context. On July 16, 2009, Mr. Karl Krapek was appointed Chairman of the Board of Trustees; at the October 1 Board meeting, the Executive Committee of the Board awarded Chancellor Carter a bonus of \$82,500, roughly 20% of the Chancellor's salary and more than the maximum salary for an assistant professor and for many staff members in the CSU system; at the same meeting, the Executive Committee of the Board approved a dramatic change in Board

policy, the second such change under Chancellor Carter's tenure: the first, in 2006, reduced from 12 months to 3 months the notice given to a noncontinued President; this second change went even further, giving the Chancellor the power to noncontinue Presidents with only the concurrence of the Board Chair. Not surprisingly, six weeks after being granted this power, the Chancellor used it. On November 17 the President of SCSU, Cheryl Norton, was noncontinued. The new noncontinuation policy does allow the full Board to vote on, and perhaps even to overturn, an agreement made between the Chancellor and the Board Chair to noncontinue a President. In this case, however, the allowance was only theoretical; the handling of President Norton's noncontinuation made it an impossibility. Why? The full Board would not meet until December 10. The noncontinuation letter had already been sent three weeks earlier; and on December 9, President Norton signed a separation agreement. As a result, the "possible management personnel issue" was removed from the meeting agenda for December 10. A day later, President Norton sent a resignation letter to Chancellor Carter.

Now, the Executive Committee's awarding of the bonus and the revision of the noncontinuation policy came to light quickly and caused an immediate outcry, an outcry that has continued for several months. On December 17, the CSU-AAUP Council, representing the faculty at all four CSU campuses, sent a letter to the Board objecting to the Board's decision to award the Chancellor an enormous Bonus, particularly in light of salary freezes and furlough days for CSU faculty and staff; at the same time, the

Committee strongly criticized the change in the noncontinuation policy as providing the Chancellor with “a disproportionate share of decision-making power and threatening to undermine the relative autonomy of each university President and thus the independence of each university campus.”

On January 19, the SCSU Faculty Senate sent a letter to Board Chairman Krapek asking for a reversal of the noncontinuation policy, citing it as a mechanism for secrecy and an abdication of board oversight, which has traditionally involved the full board in decisions of hiring, review, and noncontinuation. Over the next three months, the remaining three CSU University Senates, bodies that represent both faculty *and* administrators, passed resolutions against the noncontinuation policy. Finally, at the May 13 Board of Trustees meeting held at Central Connecticut State, two Trustees publically voiced their concerns about the policy. Trustee Wetmore deemed it “an embarrassment” and “a very dangerous precedent for the entire system,” while Trustee Williams called for an immediate review of the noncontinuation policy.

While the noncontinuation policy has drawn sustained criticism since December, the first use of that policy did not come to light until months later. On April 17, a Connecticut Mirror article built on a Freedom of Information request showed that President Norton had in fact been noncontinued by the Chancellor, with the concurrence of the Board Chair, prior to her retirement. We still do not know why she was noncontinued. Nonperformance? Unethical behavior?

The Chancellor's personal dislike for her? If it was one of the first two, why was she rewarded with a 280,000 buy-out? If it was mere dislike, I have to ask, like many others, is dislike sufficient grounds for firing? Regardless of the answer, I'm left wondering if a public system of education, with a Board of Trustees, with a commitment to transparency, should invest one individual with the power to execute his will, in secret. I hope today's hearing will shed light on this central issue. What we do know, in spite of the many unanswered questions, is that next year the state will be paying for two Presidents at one school, at an additional cost of \$280,000.

We also know that the Chancellor's first secret agreement was followed by a decision with its own secret elements. The April 2nd appointment of Dr. Stanley Battle as Interim-President left the community at Southern convinced of the Chancellor's power, but also troubled by his judgment. Despite the impending departure of one President under questionable circumstances; and despite formal requests by both the SCSU-AAUP and the Faculty Senate for an appointment of an interim President from within the University, with immediate precedents for such an appointment at both Southern and Eastern; and despite more than one request for a meeting and a discussion with the Chancellor about the appointment, the Chancellor refused to meet. He insisted that it was his decision, and his alone, and that he had spoken to people around the country to find the best candidate for the position. What he failed to disclose, however, was that he had already appointed Dr. Battle as a consultant to the CSU System. Dr. Battle highlighted

that fact in his recent application for the Presidency at North Dakota State University, but Chancellor Carter omitted that fact in his discussion of Dr. Battle's experience. Why? If Dr. Battle was already involved in the CSU system, why withhold that information?

Let me conclude by acknowledging, in both Chairman Krapek and Chancellor Carter's behalf, that they have at times attempted to reassure us. In a December letter, Chairman Krapek defended the noncontinuation policy by saying it was designed for "the noble purpose of protecting privacy." But it can also serve the ignoble purpose of concealing the misuse of power. In this case, it failed to realize either purpose. President Norton's firing become public, and the secret maneuvers of Chancellor Carter and Chairman Krapek became public. A bad policy produces a train of bad consequences in its wake. And this is bad policy, a conclusion reached by the representative bodies of all four state universities.

In his defense, Chancellor Carter has urged us to see that he is merely following board policy. But we would have to believe, then, that he had no choice in the matter, that "board policy" were written in stone and handed down from on high. In fact, the Board makes its own policies. More to the point, the Board makes AND remakes its policies. Since Dr. Carter began as Chancellor, the policy on noncontinuation has been remade *twice*, first in 2006 and then in 2009. In each case, the remakes have created a more inhospitable climate for CSU Presidents. The first remake allowed a President to be fired more quickly (3 months notice vs. 12), and the second

allowed a President to be fired more easily (by secret compact between the Chancellor and the Board Chair vs. public vote of the full Board). The Chancellor and the Chair are not, as they wish to appear, the faithful servants of an eternal rule. They are making up the rules as they go along.